

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Dream Floats, LLC

Manufacturing Extension Partnership of Louisiana

New Product Development Has Dream Floats Selling

Client Profile:

Dream Floats, LLC, founded in 2008, is a privately-owned manufacturer of water float and patio furniture cushions. The company employs 4 people at its facility in Morgan City, Louisiana.

Situation:

An employee of Dream Floats experienced firsthand the comfort of a new way to lounge or float in a pool and decided to take the idea of a large, bean bag type cushion that feels more like a pillow, improve the design, and market it to a national audience. There were two main concerns with the design. First, the cushion absorbed too much water, making it heavy and difficult to pull out of a pool. Secondly, they wanted to investigate environmentally friendly fill materials. Dream Float's Managing Partner Leah Begley said, "We wanted to be sure that if the float ruptured in a waterway and not a pool environment, the fill material would eventually degrade." The material initially used was Expanded Polystyrene (EPS), which was excellent for buoyancy, but was not degradable. The company called upon the Manufacturing Extension Partnership of Louisiana (MEPOL), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for help.

Solution:

MEPOL assisted the company through partial funding from the Small and Emerging Business Development grant administered by Louisiana Economic Development. With funding in place, minor design revisions solved the water absorption problem by integrating a functional drain system in the corner of the cushions to let water flow through the float. MEPOL also recommended using Expanded Polypropylene (EPP) as the fill material, which has many of the same characteristics of styrene, but will eventually degrade in the environment. Begley said, "Through MEPOL's services, we were able to come up with a functional design and get a patent pending, which led us to begin manufacturing the floats. We have since been able to hire an additional employee, retain the three employees that we started with, and have started making sales."

Results:

- * Realized \$23,000 in savings.
- * Invested \$3,800 in new equipment.
- * Retained 3 employees.
- * Created 1 job.

Testimonial:

"MEPOL allowed us to develop our product in a time period that would not have been possible if we were to do it without their assistance. Through their knowledge and assistance, we were able to overcome problems in a matter of months instead of what could have been years doing it on our own."

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We were able to get our floats functioning like we envisioned them to, a provisional patent, begin manufacturing and making sales!"

Leah Begley, Managing Partner